Tuesday, January 20, 2004 Dumping of wastes by cruise ships targeted

By LARRY LANGE, SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTER

Spurred by a recent dumping of sewage by a cruise ship in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, a Seattle lawmaker has introduced legislation to provide new penalties against the practice.

Rep. Mary Lou Dickerson, D-Seattle, said her original idea for House Bill 2549 came from an Alaska lawmaker who helped to enact a similar measure in that state, a major destination for cruise ships calling in Seattle. The discharge in May of 40 tons of sewage from the Norwegian Sun northwest of Port Townsend "added to my inspiration," Dickerson said.

The measure, introduced last week, would impose \$25,000-a day penalties for dumping a variety of wastes, including untreated sewage, sludge from ship toilets and sinks and oily liquid from bilges.

It would allow the state Department of Ecology to monitor cruise ships' compliance and charge a per-passenger fee to pay for the program.

The bill, referred to the House Fisheries, Ecology and Parks Committee, would require ports such as Seattle's to include compliance in contracts with cruise ship operators.

Dickerson said parts of the measure are covered by other laws but that the new bill would "make it more explicit and would develop a (funding) source for monitoring what they're doing."

A hearing is set for Jan. 27. There are three co-sponsors.

Dickerson said one cruise ship lobbyist had said his employer "will probably oppose it," but the lobbyist could not be reached. Other cruise line representatives did not return telephone messages.

Seattle port spokesman Mick Shultz said the port is not yet taking a position on the measure. The port is trying to negotiate a separate agreement with the cruise industry regulating waste discharges.

That pact could allow state inspectors onto ships, though vessel operators would report violations in a system similar to those for sewage treatment plants, said water quality manager Kevin Fitzpatrick of the Department of Ecology.

"I don't think anybody wants to put forth the kind of money that would put an inspector over ... every marine sanitation device on a cruise ship," Fitzpatrick said.

Dickerson, however, said an agreement of the kind being discussed wouldn't provide enough protection.

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